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ABSTRACT

Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success is a unique Chicano dropout prevention program in a large Los Angeles junior high school. Program features include: (1) focus on the school's highest-risk students; (2) construction of a comprehensive cluster of research-based interventions addressing four different spheres of influence on school performance (student, teacher, school, and family); and (3) rigorous evaluation design involving true random assignment to treatment and control groups and extensive cost effectiveness evaluation. Subjects entered grade 7 in 1990 and included 102 very high-risk students and all learning disabled and severely emotionally disturbed students. Interventions provided to treatment groups were: (1) counseling that included training in problem solving; (2) frequent teacher feedback to students and parents; (3) close monitoring of attendance; (4) extracurricular activities to decrease student alienation; and (5) parent training and participation in school and literacy activities. Two years into the 3-year project, preliminary outcomes suggest program success in improving attrition, attendance, and grades for treatment groups relative to controls. Cost per student per year was an estimated $500. Contrary to an initial assumption that the project would simply augment traditional school programs, project staff discovered the need to mitigate and remediate the negative and damaging effects of school culture on student learning and attitudes. Advocacy and brokerage functions were expanded, and project staff developed methods to bridge three cultural boundaries: those of school culture, student culture, and Chicano culture. Contains 65 references. (SV)

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Keeping High-Risk Chicano Students in School: Lessons from a Los Angeles Middle School Dropout Prevention Program

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One of the major challenges facing American education is reducing the number of students who fail to graduate from high school. The urgency of this challenge was recognized by the President and the nation's governors when they adopted the goal of increasing the high school graduation rate to 90 percent by the year 2000 as one of the six National Goals of Education. A related objective is to eliminate the gap in high school graduation rates between minority and non-minority students (U.S. Department of Education, 1990, pp. 4-5).

The urgency to reduce dropout rates is predicated on two concerns. The first is economic. Dropouts experience higher rates of unemployment, receive lower earnings, and are more likely to require social services over their entire lifetimes than high school graduates (Rumberger 1987; Stern, Paik, Catterall, Nakata, 1989). In short, dropouts are costly. One year's cohort of dropouts from Los Angeles city schools was estimated to cost $3.2 billion in lost earnings and more than $400 million in social services (Catterall, 1987, Tables 3 and 4). The social costs of failing to complete high school could rise in the future as the demands for low-skilled labor are reduced.

The second reason for the an urgent response to the dropout problem is demographic. Demographic changes in the U.S. are increasing the number of persons who traditionally are more likely to drop out of school: minorities, poor children, and children living in single family households (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990).

The dropout issue is a particular concern for Hispanics. Hispanics have the highest dropout rate among the major ethnic groups in the U.S. In 1989, the percent of high school dropouts among persons 16 to 24 years old was 32 percent

for Hispanics, 13 percent for Blacks and 11 percent for Caucasians (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, Table 97). The Hispanic population is also expected to grow faster than any other major ethnic group. Between 1985 and 2020, the number of Caucasian youth 18-24 is expected to decline by 25%, while the number of Hispanic youth will increase by 65% (Rumberger, 1990, Table 2). Thus, based on current dropout rates, the total number of young dropouts could actually increase over the next 35 years. These trends are not lost on employers, who are now among the most vocal proponents of educational reform to improve school success for Hispanic and other minority populations (e.g., Committee for Economic Development, 1987).

Although a wide variety of programs and policies have been initiated at the national, state, and local levels to help students finish school, few specifically target Hispanic youngsters. Of the almost 500 school or community based dropout programs nationwide surveyed by the U.S. Government Accounting Office 1986, only 26 served primarily Hispanic youth (U.S. GAO, 1987, p. 27). Clearly more programs are needed that target this population.

The need is especially urgent in California, where Hispanics represent 34 percent of current (1990) students and will comprise 58 percent of all new students projected to enter the State's educational system in the next ten years (California Department of Finance, 1991). If California fails to address the Hispanic dropout problem successfully, a large portion of its workforce will lack the education to successfully contribute to the State's economy.

Research literature indicates that Hispanic dropouts display many of the same characteristics as other students: low academic achievement, a dislike for

school, discipline problems, and low educational aspirations (Rumberger, 1991). Yet there are some important differences. First, Hispanics are more likely to attend large urban schools with high concentrations of poor, minority students (Orfield & Monfort, 1988). In such settings, dropping out is more the rule than the exception (Hess & Lauber, 1986; Fine, 1991). Second, Hispanics are more likely to drop out before reaching high school. National data show that almost 50% of Hispanic males who left school between October 1984 and 1985 dropped out before the 9th grade (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988, Table 7). Thus, dropout prevention for Hispanic students needs to focus on their middle school years.

Efforts to address the Hispanic dropout problem must also be sensitive to the vast differences in the Hispanic population. Hispanic generally refers to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (Brown, Rosen, Hill, & Olivas, 1980, p. 2). Along a variety of educational and economic indicators, the differences among Hispanic sub-groups are actually greater than differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic populations. For instance, in 1988 differences in dropout rates between Cuban and Mexican origin populations were greater than differences in dropout rates between Hispanic and non-Hispanic populations (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988a, Table 1). Therefore, attention to sub-group differences is as warranted as attention to major ethnic group differences.

Mexican Americans or Chicanos represent two-thirds of the Hispanic population in the United States, by far the largest of the Hispanic sub-groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988a, Table 1). Chicanos represent an even larger proportion of the Hispanic population in Texas and California (Orum, 1986, p. 7).

Moreover, they generally have the lowest socioeconomic status and the lowest level of educational attainment of all the Hispanic sub-groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988a). Thus the educational and economic circumstances of Chicanos warrant particular attention by researchers and policy makers. Of course, Chicanos themselves are a diverse group who differ in such ways as language use, immigration status, and their own ethnic identities (Matute-Bianchi, 1986).

This paper describes the initial implementation and outcomes of a unique Chicano dropout prevention program in a large, urban junior high school in Los Angeles. Three features make this program unique. First, it focuses on the highest-risk Chicano students in the school--both identified special education students and other high-risk students--students who utilize a disproportionate share of school resources because of their academic, attendance, and disciplinary problems and who are most at-risk of school failure and dropping out (Larson, 1989a). Second, it utilizes research evidence to construct a comprehensive cluster of interventions that addresses four different spheres of influence on a student's life and school performance: the student, the teacher, the school, and the family. Third, the program is being conducted using a rigorous research and evaluation design, involving true random assignment between treatment and control groups and an extensive evaluation of costs and effectiveness.

The remainder of the paper describes the program and some preliminary effects. The next section explains the components of the program, the setting and target population, and the design of the research project used to assess its effectiveness. The following section describes how the program was implemented and the problems encountered in doing so. The third section describes some

preliminary findings from the project. The last section draws some initial conclusions about the project and the challenge of secondary school reform.

The ALAS Program

Program Components

The program is called ALAS--Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success--which translates to "wings" in Spanish. It consists of a series of specific intervention strategies that simultaneously address some of the most critical factors operating within four spheres of influence on student achievement: **students, teachers, the school, and parents**. The interventions address the following factors:

Student's social and task-related behavior. Social and task-related behavior and problem solving skills have been consistently reported as problematic for low-achieving youth. School behavior problems contribute directly to low grades and dropping out (Kavale, Alper & Purcell, 1981; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). These are also the problems that most disturb teachers and school staff (Larson, Laser, & Gao, in prep). For example, in a recent study of Hispanic junior high school students, the 500 highest-risk (see Methods for definition) students had four times the rate of classroom expulsions as other students and generated nearly 25,000 disciplinary contacts during seventh and eighth grades (Larson 1989a, 1989b)! This disproportionate use of staff time was a major disincentive for school staff to try to keep these highest-risk students in school.

To positively enhance students' social and task-related behavior, the ALAS program incorporates a student social metacognitive problem solving training program previously found effective in significantly reducing truancy and

misbehavior incidents and improving school work habits and academic grades in a highest-risk group of Hispanic junior high school students (Larson, 1989a). This training program was also found to significantly reduce misbehavior and improve prosocial behavior in a group of emotionally disturbed and learning disturbed incarcerated delinquents (Larson, 1987) and to increase school and work days and reduce gang involvement, drug use and crime in a group of chronic delinquents (Larson, 1989c). A significant advantage of the problem solving approach to counseling is that students are taught to apply the skills to their own unique problems whether these be familial, peer, drug use, gang, or academic. Thus, the approach follows the National Consortium on School Dropout (1986) recommendation that interventions be individualized to address each student's unique problems.

Despite the proven effectiveness of this particular problem solving training curriculum, initial results from this study as well as previous studies suggest the need to supplement the training with additional interventions.

Teacher feedback. A basic principle of behavior change is specific and frequent feedback to the performer. The traditional feedback system in secondary schools is report card grades every ten weeks. Many schools provide interim "progress reports" every five weeks. However, low-achieving students require feedback and progress reports much more frequently than this. Larson (1989a) found that the lowest-achieving junior high school students were not able to accurately predict their five week school grades without interim feedback reports from teachers.

The ALAS program provides daily, weekly, or bimonthly teacher feedback

reports to students and their parents depending upon student need. In an earlier study, Chicano students who received feedback with parent notification improved classroom performance and attendance, while students who received weekly feedback without parent notification did not (Larson, 1988b). Students used this teacher feedback for focusing thinking and decision making during problem solving maintenance training. Moreover, low-income Hispanic parents in this study consistently expressed appreciation for being informed weekly and the students reported that the teacher feedback reports and home notes made a positive impact on their school behavior. In another study, Hispanic parents were angry when the school did not notify them of their adolescent's poor school performance, even though the parents did not initiate any school contacts themselves (Delgado-Gaitan, 1988).

School attendance monitoring. Prior research shows consistently that dropouts have poor school attendance prior to dropping out (e.g., Ekstrom et. al, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Patterns of truancy are gradual and tend to increase as students progress through junior high school (Larson, 1989a, 1989b). In many large secondary schools, attendance is not closely monitored and students quickly get the message that school staff don't really care whether they are in school or not. The High School and Beyond data of 50,000 high school students show that twice as many Hispanic dropouts admit to cutting classes compared to non-dropout Hispanics (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

The ALAS program provides **hot-seat attendance monitoring**, which is school monitoring of period-by-period attendance. Parents are contacted daily about student truancy or extended absence. Students are required to make up

missed time and are provided with positive adult contacts communicating a personal interest in the student's attendance.

The few studies which have tested the individual effects of attendance monitoring report positive results. For example, Grossmont High School District in San Diego County, California, an area with high concentrations of Hispanics, found that period-by-period monitoring refocused counselors attention from documenting absences to identifying and solving attendance problems (Jacobson, 1984). Other studies have also found that monitoring and enforcement of attendance policies have a positive impact on attendance (Clark, 1987; Grosnickle, 1986).

Increase the student's affiliation with school. Several studies have found that dropouts are more likely than other students to report being alienated from school, feeling that schools and teachers didn't care about them, not having an adult at school to turn to for help, and not participating in extracurricular events (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986, Wehlage, et al., 1989, Finn, 1989). Ethnic and racial minorities are less likely to report a sense of membership or bonding to school than do other students (Ogbu, 1989). Hispanic students often show less affiliation for school than middle class or Anglo students because they feel alienated from the norms and values of mainstream education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1988). This alienation and resultant poor achievement tend to increase the longer Hispanic students reside in the U.S. (Hayes-Bautista, Schienk & Chapa, 1989, Fernandez & Nielsen, 1986). Lack of affiliation with school is also sadly seen in the data showing that Hispanic dropouts have higher self-esteem than Hispanic adolescents who remain in school (Wehlage & Rutter,1986).

Wehlage et. al. (1989) suggest that for a student to become socially bonded to school he/she must feel attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. When the student feels personal concern and caring from at least one significant adult in the school; when the student participates in extracurricular school activities and when adults express belief in the student and provide ways for the student to feel successful, then the student will become bonded to the school and its goals.

The ALAS program provides both student-student and adult-student bonding activities. A number of extracurricular activities are provided for students to stimulate bonding with other students. In addition, the ALAS staff function as adult advocates for student participants, which helps develop adult-student bonding.

Parent participation and monitoring. Parental values and attitudes play an important role in students' academic achievement (Davies & Kandel, 1981, Lareau, 1989, Epstein, 1990). Parental monitoring of students' behavior also has a positive impact on grades and homework completion (Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987). Lower-class parents, including parents of graduating low-achieving students, attend school events less, make fewer complaints to the principal, and enroll their child less in summer school than middle class parents (e.g., Lightfoot, 1983; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Lareau, 1989). Parents of dropouts are less involved in their child's education than other parents (Rumberger, et al., 1990).

Hispanic parents interact significantly less than non-Hispanic parents with teachers and school personnel, but not because they don't value education. Rather, Hispanic parents often do not understand the role they are expected to play in their child's education or they lack the confidence and skills to interact with teachers and

other school staff (Casas & Furlong, 1986, Delgado-Gaitan, 1986, 1990).

The fifth and final component of the ALAS program is to train parents in two skills (1) parent-child problem solving, and (2) parent participation in school and literacy activities. The parent-child problem solving training consists of weekly problem solving "tutorials" that are mailed to parents and provide specific suggestions for improving their child's school behavior. Parents receive direct instruction and modeling in how to reduce their child's inappropriate or undesirable behavior and how to increase desirable behavior. In addition, parents receive instruction in how and when: to participate in school activities, to contact teachers and administrators, and to monitor their child's school performance.

Setting

The ALAS program is being implemented in a large junior high school (grades 7-9) in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The school enrolls 2,000 students, 94 percent of whom are Hispanic, with nearly all of these being Chicano or Mexican-American. Average student performance is at the 25th percentile rank on the CTBS, making it one of the 25 lowest academically achieving schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Absenteeism averages 25 percent for 7th and 8th graders. And although middle schools are not required to keep dropout statistics, the school principal recently reported that up to 50 percent of the students may never reach high school. In addition, the California State Department of Education (1989) reports that 61 percent of the students' parents did not graduate from high school and 75 percent speak only Spanish in the home.

The setting for this project is better illustrated by examining the students who attend this school and the circumstances of their lives. This is revealed

through an informal survey of 130 incoming 7th graders conducted by one of the teachers in the school in the Summer of 1991. Partial results, shown in Table 1, reveal that many students live in a world surrounded by crime, gangs, and the constant threat of death. Almost two-thirds of all students reported they had good friends in gangs and more than one-third reported that someone close to them had died violently! These student reports are confirmed by recent statistics that show an average of almost one teenager per day died violently (most from guns) in the County of Los Angeles in 1990 (Berger, 1991). The school itself is located in an area in which there are more than 30 active gangs. In fact, students are allowed to leave the campus from two sides depending on their affiliation with the two gangs that control the territory on either side of the school. Clearly, the students in our program are not typical middle school students. But their family situations are not unlike those faced by many inner-city, minority youth (Wilson, 1987).

Program Participants

This project targets three different populations of 7th grade students: (1) the highest-risk group or bottom 25 percent of regular, entering students and two groups of special education students, (2) learning disabled students and (3) emotionally disturbed students.

Prior work shows Hispanic youth can be systematically and reliablely differentiated into higher-risk and lower-risk groups based on a five-item teacher rating that identifies (1) need for supervision, (2) level of motivation, (3) academic potential, (4) social interaction skill, and (5) teachability (Larson, 1989b). This scale was previously used to measure student characteristics related to teacher decision making (Shavelson, Cadwell, & Izu, 1977; Pullis & Cadwell, 1982) and

to predict special education referral at both the elementary level (Gerber & Semmel, 1985) and secondary level (Larson, 1985).

In a study of 350 students from 13 sixth grade Hispanic classrooms, Larson (1989a) found 30 percent were in the highest-risk category and that these students were functioning on average at the 17th percentile rank on national norms of the CTBS whereas their peers were functioning at about the 40th percentile rank. And two and half years later, the ratings predicted 73 percent of the variance in eighth grade classroom expulsions, 80 percent of the truancy, 50 percent of the cooperation grades, 67 percent of whole day absences, 30 percent of the work habit grades, and 50 percent of the variance in grade point average. As junior high school students, targeted highest-risk students had four times the rate of classroom removal for disciplinary reasons, received significantly more fail grades, and had significantly higher truancy rates than lower-risk peers. The highest-risk students also received significantly lower teacher ratings of task-related and social-emotional behavior than than their lower-risk peers .

Subjects for the high-risk group were selected from those students who entered the school in the Fall of 1990 from 11 feeder elementary schools. All sixth grade students in those schools (approximately 625 students from 23 classrooms) were assessed by their classroom teachers in the Spring of 1990. For each classroom, the classroom mean and standard deviation of each of the five scale items were calculated. Every student within a given classroom was assigned a "troublesome" score which is the total number of rating scale items he or she is one standard deviation below their classroom mean (i.e. troublesome scores range from 0 to 5). Students were targeted as highest-risk if they were at least one

standard deviation above their classroom mean on the troublesome score. Approximately 25-30 percent of the students from each classroom were targeted as highest-risk using this method and, of these, 60 percent were male. All other students were targeted as lower-risk.

Of the 159 highest-risk students who entered the school as seventh graders, 57 were excluded from consideration because they were only served in limited English proficiency classrooms and could not be provided the intervention as designed. (Another study is focusing on these highest-risk LEP students). The remaining 102 students were randomly assigned to high-risk control and high-risk treatment groups. Gender was equated in both groups.

The program also targets two populations of special education students. Many educational reform initiatives do not specifically address the needs of special education students. Yet recent research has shown that special education students have dropout rates similar to or even greater than high-risk, "regular" education students (Butler-Nalin & Padilla, 1989, Table 3). The ALAS program targets all 7th grade special education students (both learning-disabled and severely-emotionally disturbed) in the years 1990 and 1991. The special education control groups will consist of 7th grade students in the years 1992 and 1993. Students in all treatment groups began their intervention as seventh graders and will continue until the end of the study at the completion of their grade ten (if this project is fully funded). Control students will be followed during this same time frame. Students who leave the school will be followed unless the move is out of the state.

Research Design

The ALAS program is being conducted in a true experimental fashion in

which eligible, high risk students were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Random assignment is not often used in program evaluations, but it is the only research method that ensures observed differences between treatment and controls groups can be attributed soley to the intervention rather than other factors. The experiment is designed to assess the impact of the program on a variety of outcome measures and to assess the costs and cost-effectiveness of the intervention.

Outcome Measures. Information is being collected on a variety of student outcomes which previous research suggests are associated with school performance and dropping out. They include school attendance, school grades, teacher ratings of cooperation and work habits, self-esteem, self-efficacy for school-classroom activities, locus of control, depression, stress, parental involvement in school activities, family configurations, student perceptions of school climate, student perceptions of teachers, student job and educational expectations, student participation in extracurricular activities and community, student attitude about their ethnicity and use of the Spanish language, student involvement in school related tasks/activities, student-parent decision making style, and English language proficiency/usage. The data are being collected from a variety of sources, including school records, standardized tests, teacher and staff ratings of students, and a student survey about parenting practices designed and refined by Dornbusch and colleagues that has been shown to predict school performance and dropout behavior (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleighet, 1987; Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, and Dornbusch, 1990; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991).

Assessment of Program Effectiveness. Program effectiveness will be assessed in three steps. First, we will generate descriptive information on the characteristics and performance of the highest-risk Hispanic youth (control group) as they progress from grade 7 through grade 10. We will also compare their experiences to other Hispanic students in the school, district, state and the nation based on published sources. Second, we will compare the treatment and control groups across the various independent variable domains discussed above. This comparison will determine the efficacy of the treatment intervention. This is the most significant objective of the project because, as stated earlier, this group of students has not been studied extensively and yet they command a high proportion of attention and resources in the school. Third, we will test multivariate models to predict attendance, school performance, and attrition based on the various student characteristics as well as by group membership (highest-risk versus lower-risk).

Cost and cost-effectiveness. The third component of the research will be to conduct a cost-effectiveness evaluation of the intervention. Most evaluation studies fail to examine costs or cost-effectiveness. Yet policymakers and practitioners must consider both issues in deciding how to have the most impact with scarce public dollars (Levin, 1988). Moreover, many studies that do examine costs only account for direct expenditures rather than all the contributed costs of participating individuals and institutions (Levin, 1983). In this study we will first assess the total costs involved in implementing the program, employing an "ingredients" method that determines all of resources (personnel, facilities, materials, etc.) used in the intervention, who contributes them, and their monetary value. Separate estimates will be made for each intervention strategy. Next we will ascertain the cost-

effectiveness of the overall intervention by computing a ratio of effects to costs. For example, if the overall intervention reduces the number of dropouts in the treatment group versus the control group by a certain number, then the cost-effectiveness of the intervention would be the total number of dropouts "prevented" divided by the total costs of the intervention, yielding a figure showing the cost for each dropout prevented.

Program Assumptions and Cultural Boundaries

The ALAS program was not designed to reform the organization, curriculum, or instruction in the school. Rather, it was designed to enhance the traditional urban secondary school experience of a group of high-risk Latino students outside of their regular classroom activities. This approach was based on the assumption that traditional school programs simply needed augmenting--both with additional resources and with expertise.

Now, after almost two years into the project, these assumptions have proved false. Contrary to our initial expectations, much of our efforts serve not simply to supplement existing school services with additional resources, but rather to mitigate and remediate the negative and damaging effects of the traditional secondary school program and culture on Chicano students' learning and attitudes toward school.

The school in which we work, like many urban schools, has limited educational resources. But the performance problems our students face at school are not simply a result of limited resources. Rather, they result from a negative school culture (Ogbu, 1990). For almost all of our ALAS students, school is a place of little learning, much rejection and, too many times, sheer cruelty.

Admittedly, our project works with the most difficult-to-teach Chicano students. Yet, these students represent about a third of the school's population and, as such, it is tragic that the alienation between students and adults in the school is so great.

Our experience is not unique. Similar experiences have been documented for a variety of students in a number of different school settings (Hess and Lauber, 1986; Fine, 1991; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). Indeed, there is longstanding evidence that Chicano students, as a whole, are treated less favorably by teachers than students of other ethnic backgrounds (Valencia, 1990). Even major reform efforts are not always able to alter the negative culture found in many secondary schools.

One recent example is the "showcase" New Futures Initiative, which was designed to address the problems of at-risk youth in four U.S. cities, including "long-term structural reforms" of the schools. After three years of effort and more than $40 million, a recent evaluation found that the model schools had changed organizationally at the surface, but had not altered the negative core school experience for students (Wehlage, Smith and Lipman, 1992). Evaluators found that "as a whole the climate of the New Futures schools remained adversarial...and the environment was characterized by conflict and exclusion rather than care and support" (p.69). They conclude that restructuring, even under the best of circumstances, will not change in fundamental ways what students experience until adults begin to forge a school culture of student support and begin to change school procedures to reflect concern, care, and hope--especially toward students in conflict with the school. According to the evaluators, one reason for the absence of such a change in the New Futures Schools is that school personnel did not really believe that change was needed. Instead, adults in the schools truly believed that it was

problems inside the students that caused student failure and not problems within the school and curriculum.

Findings from the New Futures project help support and explain our perceptions that most, if not all of the students in the ALAS project, find student-adult interactions and classroom time to be adversarial and punitive. Moreover, adults in the school appear not to be aware of just how urgently and significantly the school itself needs to change to accommodate high-risk students.

Our attempts to enhance the educational success of at-risk students seems, thus far, to be yet another example demonstrating the acute need for secondary schools to remediate the social school culture in which student-adult relationships exist. As a consequence of this negative reality, ALAS project activities have had to expand to include advocacy and brokerage functions over and beyond our original interventions designed to chance student and parent behavior. All activities have required project staff to develop methods for crossing three cultural boundaries: school culture, student culture, and Chicano culture. Below we briefly share some preliminary insights about implementing our project in terms of these three cultures.

School Culture

School culture is real and entrenched (Wehlage, et al., 1989; Fine, 1991). Problems arise when outsiders, whose intent it is to reform existing educational practices, serve neither to perpetuate nor at times even to support the existing culture as it is defined and promoted by teachers and administrators. This is the case when our ALAS staff function primarily as brokers and advocates for children and their families.

Conflict with the school culture is most pronounced when ALAS staff attempt to negotiate, individualize, and soften school policies and practices for students and families, especially for students who are colliding with the existing school culture. Students who are "slow learners"; who ignore dress codes; who are habitually late, belligerent, impulsive, or withdrawn; who come to class without supplies; who act out; or who are "unproductive," as well as parents who want additional services for their children such as special education, special counseling, or psychological assessment are all shut out by the conflict and rigidity within the school culture.

As advocates for students, the bottom line becomes one of pushing those adults who make up the system to do more, do better, and do differently; to work harder and longer; to be unorthodox; to take responsibility; and to do it now, while the child is still alive in the system. Clearly, there is increased potential for antagonism and resistance as a consequence of pushing any established social institution and of crossing over into another culture with an agenda, as is the purpose of school reform.

As a result of our attempts, sometimes less than graceful, to cross the school culture boundary, we have derived several principles which help bridge the chasm between insiders and outsiders.

Be credible and sincere. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Those have a right to criticize who also have a heart to serve." As outsiders involved in school reform efforts we have found that we must lead by example. To attenuate resistance and a complete breakdown of relations between insiders and reformers, ALAS staff has had to visibly work hard and work long at the school site. For example, ALAS

staff are usually the first in and the last out at the school site each day.

We have found that to keep insider skepticism and ill will at bay, it is critical for university researchers (project directors) to personally work at the school in a consistent fashion. Historically, academics involved in educational research have remained apart from schools and as a consequence practitioners are understandably skeptical, resistant and even resentful of outsiders who propose solutions from "the ivory tower." Only by being involved with the day-to-day realities of the school is credibility for the project goals maintained so that ALAS research staff can more effectively negotiate the school culture as outsiders.

Attend to individual adult needs. Interestingly, "little things" do hurt our relations with school staff and, as a consequence, we have learned to make extraordinary effort to attend to the details of our activities that directly impact school personnel, especially teachers. For example, the time during a class period when we can summon an ALAS student out of class for counseling is a major issue, with many teachers adamant that it be only during the first part of the class period whereas other teachers insist that it only be done during the last 5 minutes. Aggravating teachers or other school staff is unfortunately easy to do, yet extremely counterproductive in terms of negative public relations and withdrawal of support for substantive issues. We have learned that we can more easily change "big" things about the school culture as we recognize and address the unique needs and idiosyncratic practices of individual staff who make-up the adult school culture. Just as we ask educators to do with children, we have learned that it is essential for the ALAS staff, as reformers, to accommodate each adult's unique needs as much as possible.

We have come to realize that support for our efforts would not come from the "school as a whole" through disseminating reports, group inservice or other impersonal contacts, and it would not come from having the insiders "seeing the children change." Instead, support has been built through personal interaction between us--the outsiders--and teachers, counselors, administrators--the insiders. We have discovered that the most effective means of building a coalition for educational change between insiders and outsiders is to develop one-on-one relationships with individual insiders and to increase this insider base one individual at a time. Consequently, ALAS staff spend a great deal of time in conferences with individual school staff.

Be aware of covert resistance. It was only after a year and a half in the schol that we realized the most frequent and harshest criticism from teachers was not stated directly to us or expressed in notes of disgruntlement sent to our office. Instead, most teachers chose to air complaints about ALAS in the teacher's lounge or lunch room. Additionally, this was also the forum used by a few teachers who felt particularly threatened by our reform efforts. These active resistors have never come to us directly, but we have learned that they consistently use rumor and innuendo to undermine the ALAS program. Furthermore, we eventually learned that teachers who disagree with the complaint or negative inference about ALAS do not speak out or disagree publicly; even our strongest supporters tell us that they "just don't say anything."

If reform programs within schools are to succeed, it is imperative to recognize that typically teachers minimize direct confrontation with their peers, even at the expense of promoting effective practice or serving children. Historically,

there has been little or no administrative support or resource incentives within schools for teachers to speak up or criticize the practices or behavior of their colleagues; indeed, disincentives for doing this are numerous.

Our ignorance about how opinion is developed within a school context was almost our undoing. We finally realized what was happening because supportive teachers came to us in secretly and told us what they were hearing. Only then were we able to counter spreading disinformation, negativity, and resistance by implementing an information campaign addressing the rumors and false generalizations.

Use teachers as advisors. Since the inception of the project, a dozen teachers within the school have identified themselves as supporters of the ALAS program. Their knowledge and goodwill as insiders has been invaluable. We have used these teachers as advisors on how to implement a project activity, as liasons between the project and school staff, and as sounding boards on how to address a complaint about the program.

Student Culture

Crossing the borders of student culture has been another primary challenge of project staff. Working with students directly is such a significant aspect of our effort that, in one sense, it could be said that ALAS staff spend most of their time building relationship with students. Even during many of the interactions that are directed toward insiders and parents, the primary intent is to build a stronger bond between students and ALAS staff by enhancing the school and family system for them. These activities also build stronger bonds between students and parents and between students and educators.

The ALAS program attempts to embody "school" in the minds of students, and then to develop a sense of school membership and affiliation by developing a strong bond between students and the ALAS program. Our intervention components, described earlier, serve as vehicles for enhancing the student bonding and for creating nurturing and positive adult-student relationships.

Affiliation appears to be taking place as evidenced by students spontaneously bringing friends to "join" ALAS. Students throughout the school recognize ALAS as a program that helps them, and non-ALAS students often recite a long litany of "problems" for justification of joining. Students, also without prompting, have begun to refer to themselves as members of ALAS and have even designed a membership card.

In our attempts to cross student culture boundaries, we have derived four principles that describe how our project attempts to structure student-adult relationships and thereby increase student affiliation, instill hope, and promote empowerment.

Be accountable for student's growth and progress. This principle is primary and drives the remaining three principles. Our dedication to the concept of holding ourselves responsible for student performance is reflected in our use of the word intervention to describe our efforts.

Webster defines intervene as "to come in between by way of modification". We hold ourselves accountable for coming in between and modifying effectively the interface of disadvantaged youth with academic learning. It is our mission and the way we find and define professional success.

Consequently, we interpret poor student performance as our failure (see

Wehlage, et al., 1989, for similar findings). Failed classes, truancy, fighting, parent no shows are not viewed as characteristics of the kinds of students and families we work with. Rather, we view these failures as indicators that we must recast our approach, change what we are doing with this particular child and parent so they can perform optimally. This does not mean that the student or parent are not asked to change, or assume responsibility for their performance. Quite the contrary. It simply means that we must change our approach so that the student and parent can change in order to be held accountable and function optimally within an institutional learning environment.

Having staff hold themselves accountable for student performance automatically sustains motivation to be creative and to deliver maximum effort. After all, ALAS staff egos are impacted by how well "the kids do".

It also requires an ongoing assessment of student performance and frequent feedback. We check marker variables compulsively on a weekly and even daily basis--that is, we check attendance, tardies, truancies, student behavior, classroom behavior, notes home, etc. We monitor, monitor, monitor students and change our behavior based on feedback.

On the other hand, it is our experience that most secondary schools, including the one in which we work, make no on-going and systematic evaluation of school-wide student attendance, no recording of proportion of failed classes by teacher and subject, no accounting of number of students removed from class or why, no recording of the number of teacher-parent phone communications, no pre-post evaluation of learning per class, and so forth. For the most part, there is little or no accountability on the part of adults in the school for student performance.

And in instances when these variables are measured by schools, the information is not generated in order to change adult behavior toward students. It seems that the only ones held accountable for change are students, and, if they don't measure up, they are failed or suspended.

Accountability for student performance automatically creates the need for our second principle in building effective child-adult relationship.

Accept students as they are. In order to be accountable for change or performance it is essential to embrace the current reality that most urban students are not middle class Anglos. Surprisingly, most adults in schools with high proportions of minority children living in poverty appear to respond to the students as if they were middle class Anglos.

For example, in our school, assignments are given with little acknowledgement or accommodation to the fact that: few of our students have calculators, rulers, magazines or newspapers, etc. in their homes to aid homework; few of the parents know English and therefore cannot help with homework; few of the parents read or write Spanish and therefore do not read school bulletins or letters home; many of our students sleep in the living room and have no place to keep two-month projects and papers "safe" in multiple family households; many of our students have an alcoholic or drug using parent or dysfunctional families; and violence, unpaid utility bills, cockroaches, gangs and illness occupy family dynamics and clinically depress many of our students. And for many Chicano secondary school students, there's the additional problem of reading, writing and computing 3 or 4 years behind grade level.

Students must be accepted and valued for who they are and for what skills

and assets they bring to the school task. For example, Juan sleeps in a different house every night. Whether he should have been able to or not, Juan simply could not keep track of his school materials and was frequently sent out of classes for no supplies. Our solution was to personalize the environment for Juan--have extra supplies for Juan and have him keep important school work in our office. (School lockers are not a viable solution because break-in, theft and vandalism are rampant.)

Another example of accepting students as they come and the need for personalization of school is the case of Enrique. Enrique refused to come to school because he needed hourly eye drops and was too embarrassed to go to the nurse's office. The school district rule requires that a nurse administer all medication. Our solution was to convince the school to get parent permission to let him borrow a faculty bathroom key from us and put in his own drops in privacy just as he did at home.

Once one accepts students' unique needs and their life circumstances unconditionally and stops blaming them for their background, or, in some cases, the disabilities they embody, then it is a small and inevitable step to recognizing the third principle of creating an effective child-adult relationship.

Attend to students' many needs and their complex situations. Our students are not only economically needy, but often psychologically needy as well. Many are fragile. Compassion must flavor the behavior of educators who work with disadvantaged children. We have found that explaining a child's life circumstances, even the most heart-wrenching examples, engenders little empathy from adults at the school. Indeed, to our despair, explanations of the child's background often causes the student to be rejected even more--the child's life circumstances are used

as reasons for "why the student should not be in this school."

For example, Angela frequently responded sarcastically or hostilely to adults, especially men, yet when it was explained that she was a victim of child battering by her father and had gone to live with an 18 year old sister and 17 month old niece at age 14 in order to get away from the home, there was no mitigating the suspensions for "disrespectful" behavior. Elizabeth, at the beginning of her eighth grade year, discovered that both her parents were heroin addicts. Her father was jailed for selling and her mother left Elizabeth and her five younger siblings in the care of the grandparents. Elizabeth became very depressed and despondent and fell into a pattern of not completing classwork. She began having nosebleeds and was frequently absent. Yet, there was no accommodation extended to helping her complete the work or reducing the work load. Elizabeth was labeled by most of the adults at the school as "getting an attitude." Perhaps it is resignation on the part of adults in schools or a sense of being overwhelmed that make them appear so indifferent or uncaring toward children who are suffering.

High-risk Chicano students require a great deal of attending to. One third of ALAS students require daily monitoring of their school performance in order to experience success in following through on their responsibilities. About 25 percent of the ALAS students circulate teacher feedback forms throughout their school day so that their behavior and assignments can be monitored daily by ALAS staff. This feedback is used to communicate nightly with parents. Given current school resources and organizational structure, school staff cannot be expected to provide this degree of monitoring. ALAS-type services appear to be sorely needed.

Additionally, we have found that to solve students' school problems often

requires attending to their home or family problems, such as welfare, legal matters, medical problems, or siblings. Again, we can certainly expect school staff to be empathic and to demonstrate emotional and psychological support for students; however, given current resources, they cannot be expected to provide the necessary social work services that high-risk students need. Yet these services are sorely needed.

Attending to the whole child as a high-need and highly complex individual forces one to adopt the fourth principle for creating effective adult-child relationships within the school environment.

Alter and individualize procedures and policies. Flexibility requires that our staff take the time to really listen to individual students. High-risk students often have difficulty identifying a problem and expressing clearly what they need to have happen to succeed in the school. A significant task of the listening adult is to filter the confusion, frustration and often anger of the student and to determine whether the student or the system, or both, need to adjust in order for the student to succeed.

Flexibility and individualization are the key to successfully working with high-risk students. We have found that it is impossible to succeed with these most difficult-to-teach students if the school context is not tailored to their individual psychological needs and skills. Flexibility permits personalization of the educational experience for students.

We have found that success often requires only minor adjustments of school-wide procedures. We refer to this as tinkering with the system. However, as presently structured, large secondary schools are rarely malleable to even minor adjustments in policies or procedures for individual students. Student advocacy

serves primarily to "free-up" and personalize the system for each student. The degree to which an institution must respond flexibly varies with each student.

Sometimes students simply want preferences to be met. We have found that, for the most part, student preferences are discounted by school staff as nonessentials. We think this is incorrect educational practice and that it contributes significantly to student alienation. ALAS staff do not require students to justify individual preferences, to justify why the system should be changed for them. If it is possible and practical to change the system, we make every effort to get the system to accommodate individual preferences of students. We regard this as simply a form of nurturing.

Because of our "creativity" in accommodating students, ALAS project staff are frequently labeled as unorthodox. For example, Amanda was scheduled into a music class during the second semester of seventh grade. On the second day of the semester, Amanda was referred out of class by the teacher and arrived at the ALAS office fuming. This was not particularly unusual for Amanda who had a tendency to get into power struggles with adults. The problem was that in certain power struggles with adults at school, Amanda would rather be suspended or kicked out of school than give in. We soon realized that music was one of these times. The school was prepared to suspend Amanda and require her to "take music" because that is what every 7th grader did. We were able to solve the problem by convincing the school counselor to schedule Amanda to repeat an art class in which she had done well. State guidelines for fine arts credits would still be met with this option. As simple as this solution appears, it was viewed by school staff as very unorthodox. Part of the challenge for reformers is to help insiders recognize that

orthodox has not worked for many disadvantaged students.

Another example of being flexible is the case of Camilo. Because of excessive truancy, when he did begin to attend regularly, Camilo was unable to comprehend eighth grade math. Our solution was to keep him in all eighth grade classes except math and, instead, give him 7th grade math (this was considered unorthodox because traditional policy dictated that a student was either retained or passed across all subject areas). The problem was that the 7th grade math teacher on his track (it is a year round school calendar) was not willing to take him as an eighth grader. We then negotiated with another teacher on a different track (therefore, different calendar year) to take him and when her off-track (vacation) time came we scheduled him with yet another teacher. The final solution meant that Camilo was on two different grade levels with teachers from three different track calendars! This solution was indeed unorthodox but it is representative of the kinds of flexibility needed to accommodate high-risk students to large systems. Personalizing schooling seems important for all students; however, in order to succeed the 25-30 percent most-difficult-to-teach students will always need to have the school system "tweaked" to meet their individual needs.

Chicano Culture

The final boundary that we must cross to succeed with our students concerns Chicano culture. Differences between Chicano culture and the culture of typical American schools can lead to poor performance in school (e.g., Trueba & Delgado-Gaitan, 1988; Delgado-Gaintan, 1990). In many cases these differences are due to parental education and other aspects of social class rather than Chicano culture directly (Laosa & Henderson, 1991). But no matter what their origin, they

must be overcome if Chicano students are to succeed in school.

As of this writing, our project has much more to learn about Chicano culture and how it interacts with educational institutions and student performance. Nevertheless, we have derived several principles that appear to help educational practitioners bridge the boundary of Chicano culture and facilitate school performance in highest-risk Chicano youth.

Communicate with parents verbally. One important goal of our project is to learn how schools can communicate with Chicano parents to increase their involvement with their children's education. Home-school communication is vital to student achievement (Epstein, 199). Our project is founded on the assumption that Chicano parents, like most parents, care about how their children are doing in school and want to be informed (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990).

In planning the project, we determined that it would be more cost-effective to communicate with parents in writting than through personal or telephone contacts. Thus, we initially mailed weekly notes to parents about their child's specific school performance and other school related events, such as report card dates, school activities, community resources, parent meetings, and so forth. All of our written communication to parents was written in a personal tone, simply and in both Spanish and English. We hypothesized that the effort would have a substantial payoff for improving student behavior.

Yet, from the outset, it seemed that our substantial efforts at home notes were unsuccessful. When queried, parents would tell us they had not seen our weekly note or would not respond to the communique as requested. The problem was not incorrect addresses. Rather, parents cited a number of reasons for not

receiving the written information: (1) mail is lost within the home because many people open mail, including children who often function as brokers between their parents and the mainstream society; (2) mail is opened by older siblings who have taken on the role of parent and who will often, without informing the parent, use their own judgement to admonish or praise younger siblings about school performance; (3) mail does not get opened for two or three weeks after being received because for many low-income, immigrant families, mail frequently represents negative events such as legal notices, immigration inquires, and bills. It is unclear whether these hindrances are common to low-income, immigrant families in general or just to low-income Chicano families. We have definitely found, however, that these communication hindrances must be reconciled if schools and low-income Chicano parents are to build a working partnership.

After a year and a half of trying to find best methods to communicate in writing with low-income Chicano parents we have abandoned this approach and replaced it with direct contact, either in person or by telephone. Talking to parents directly has not been easy or convenient for ALAS counselors--it requires Spanish language skills or translators as well as being available before 7:00 a.m or after 10:00 p.m.and on week-ends. It is also difficult to reach many parents via the telephone and requires two, three or four attempts. And lastly, about ten percent of our families have no telephone and require home visits to make contact. However, the payoff from talking to parents directly has been tremendous. After just a few direct contacts from ALAS counselors, parents who were not yet "connected" to the ALAS project after a year of receiving notes home have became strong allies and cooperative partners in designing interventions to help their child succeed in

school. The most crucial result of parents dialoguing directly with the ALAS counselor appears to be the parent's opportunity to assess and ultimately confirm the commitment, caring and concern the ALAS counselor has for their child. This simply cannot be accomplished through written communiques. We have found that most of the parents of ALAS students say that they feel greatly unempowered when facing school personnel and that previous interactions with school personnel have developed much mistrust, fear, and alienation toward the educational system. Our direct contact with parents has become crucial in establishing a bond and sense of trust between the ALAS family members and counselors. Thus, contrary to our initial assumption, direct dialogue with parents is the most effective and perhaps the most cost effective method of building a partnership between Chicano parents and educators.

Help parents be more directive in their adolescent's life. Some preliminary research suggests that parents of school dropouts have a more laissez-faire or authoritarian style of parenting (Rumberger, et al., 1989). Similarly, we have found that our Chicano parents are, as a rule, quite laissez-faire when it comes to setting boundaries for their adolescent sons, but quite authoritarian in setting boundaries for their daughters. Boys were frequently truant from school, wore gang related clothes, hung out on the street, and received poor grades in school with little or no consequences from parents. On the other hand, the girls were quite unhappy for being under strict parental control when it came to social behavior such as dress and going out; however, they did not receive specific parental intervention for school absenteeism or poor school grades.

For most of the parents of ALAS students, the parenting style was not

effective in successfully guiding their adolescent into a culture which was substantially different from the one they grew up in. Their children were not succeeding in school, had brushes with the police and were teetering on the brink of gang involvement. Parents readily expressed concern and dissatisfaction with the how their child was performing and to their credit were very open to being helped to apply different methods to guiding their offspring. ALAS counselors have taken an active role encouraging, training and supporting parents to give specific punishments and rewards when their adolescent does or does not meet agreed upon behavior standards.

Preliminary Outcomes

The ALAS project is designed to work with youngsters all three years they attend junior high school. To date we have been working in the school almost two years. Thus, a final evaluation of the project is more than a year away. But we have collected a variety of qualitative and quantitative data that provide the basis for a preliminary evaluation of the project. These data suggest that the project is successful in improving attrition, attendance, and grades for the highest-risk Chicano students in the school. Summary data for the high-risk cohort (excluding the Special Education groups) from the first semester of the 8th grade are shown in Table 3.

Attrition

The data indicate that students in the ALAS program are much more likely to be enrolled in school than a comparable group who are not receiving ALAS services. Of the original two 45-student cohorts, 41 from the ALAS (treatment) group are were still in school as of April in the 8th grade year, compared to 33

from the non-ALAS (control) group. At this point we have not identified how many of the school leavers are enrolled in another school and how many have actually dropped out. The large differences in the two groups suggest much higher dropout rates for the control group. In fact, frequent school changes by themselves significantly increase the likelihood that a student will drop out of school (Kaufman & Bradby, 1991, Table 3.2).

One common reason difficult-to-teach middle school students leave school is due to administrative transfers, often referred to by school staff as "opportunity transfers" or by students as getting "kicked out". We have come to realize that ALAS students are at continuous risk of being administratively transferred because of their behavior, their "attitude" or their poor attendance. Cesar illustrates a case in point.

Cesar lived with his mother and three younger siblings in a garage that was divided into sleeping quarters and a make-shift kitchen with no running water. After numerous contacts with his mother, who spoke only Spanish and supported the family by working long hours in a minimum wage job, it became clear that help from home in terms of discipline and follow through about school behavior was not going to happen. Whether it should happen was not a question. The reality was that ALAS staff alone would somehow have to help Cesar function effectively in school. During the first semester of seventh grade Cesar failed every class because of poor attendance and lack of completed assignments. By the end of seventh grade, because of daily monitoring and individual help from ALAS, Cesar was able to pass two out of his six classes. As he entered eighth grade, it was apparent that Cesar was spending more and more time after school away from the

garage and out on the streets. He began to wear gang-related attire and hair styles. When confronted he denied all gang involvement. Cesar was not liked by school teachers or administrators. He was never directly disrespectful or hostile to adults; however, his "don't-give-a-damn" attitude created resentment and anger in most adults he met. His gang attire served to reinforce negative perceptions and encouraged adults to respond to him in humiliating ways (for example, he was once confronted publicly by a teacher and told in front of a crowd to empty his pockets because something was missing from the teacher's class--Cesar was found to be innocent).

We, on the other hand, knew Cesar as a quiet boy who had significant learning problems and difficulty expressing himself. Clearly, Cesar was conflicted about trying in school, but he consistently indicated that he did want to succeed and, each time he did achieve some success, satisfaction lit-up his face. We made a concerted effort to praise and compliment Cesar for every positive effort he made. The ALAS office was the only place in school where he was greeted with a smiling face and genuinely welcomed. We got him assigned one period each day as our office helper. We continued to monitor his daily school behavior by having him circulate a feedback report from teachers. With counseling in problem solving and expressed expectations and encouragement, Cesar gradually developed a strong bond with ALAS staff. This began to payoff with improved grades. By the end of the first semester of eighth grade Cesar received his best grades 3 Cs, 1 A and 2 Fails. Teachers began to respond to him differently; however, because he did not change his "appearance," school administrators did not perceptively change their attitude about him. This was to have dire consequences for Cesar.

Two weeks into his last semester of eighth grade, Cesar got into a fight in the lunch area. He kicked a younger student. Because of this incident an administrator in the school decided that Cesar could no longer attend the school. All negotiations with the school failed. Other punishments and restrictions for Cesar were rejected. ALAS staff offered to escort Cesar at all times and shorten his school day so that he could leave campus before lunch. We felt that to leave the school and the support of ALAS would result in Cesar dropping out and likely entering a life of crime. To our deep disappointment, the "opportunity transfer" was executed. The paperwork for transferring Cesar to another school was completed and sent to the "receiving" school. No effort was made by the school to see that Cesar actually enrolled in the other school or that he attended. The other school received his transfer papers but no effort was made to find this boy when he didn't show up. Eight months have gone by and Cesar has not been in any school a single day, even though he is not yet 15 years old. We recently saw Cesar hanging out on the street with a group of older boys. He told us that he had taken himself to the community adult education center but was told to come back in two years when he was sixteen.

Cesar's story illustrates well several aspects of the ALAS program and the context in which it functions; the hardship of our students' lives which permeates everything we do; the limited ability of marginalized Chicano students and families to cope with the demands of traditional, large urban schools; the daily rejection and repudiation by school staff of students in conflict with the school; the slow progression of student behavioral change; the need for continuous and significant adult support within the school setting for high-risk students; the lack of

accountability and follow through by school staff on decisions that powerfully impact high-risk students' lives and futures; the significance of influence that adult acceptance, affection and validation have on adolescents; and the fragility of success.

Attendance

ALAS students have made significant progress in improving their attendance. Although first semester data do not show large differences in average attendance between ALAS and non-ALAS students (see Table 3), they do show great differences in the extent of chronic absences. Only 5 percent of the ALAS students were absent more than 30 days in the first semester of 8th grade, compared to 21 percent of the control students. In some cases, ALAS staff were able to make remarkable changes in student behavior. Joe is one such case.

Joe, a seventh grader, stayed home from school more often than he went. Joe's mother was extremely young. She had him while she was a seventh grader attending the same middle school that Joe was dropping out of. We didn't learn this, however, until nearly the end of Joe's seventh grade year. At that point we were told by his aunt, with whom he lived periodically, that his excessive absences (we contact families every day a student is absent) were the result of severe asthma. We were in the process of getting Joe home teaching when his mother showed up and "confessed" that Joe did not have asthma and that he simply refused to go to school.

After his mother's visit, we instigated a policy to pick Joe up for school. In doing this, we uncovered the complications that kept Joe from school. Joe, his mother and three younger siblings slept in one of three relatives' houses. Which

house was apparently decided spontaneously because we would often be told to pick him up one place only to find that he hadn't slept there after all. Picking Joe up improved his attendance but he was still absent two days per week. We then discovered that his sister, a year younger, was not going to school either and that the five year old had not been enrolled in kindergarten because the mother had not gotten the proper inoculations. It became clear that to get Joe to school regularly, we would have to facilitate the whole family attending school. This included the mother who had just been cut off from public assistance because she did not attend job training regularly. Through coaching the mother, delivering all children to school (the mother had no transportation) and helping the mother re-enroll in job training, we have been able to get Joe to school 90 percent of the time in the last six months.

Grades

The high-risk population that ALAS targets are extremely poor performers. Our intervention, which does not focus on academics directly, is expected to increase the number of classes that students are able to pass. Preliminary data suggest we are making some improvement in this area. Future data will also examine changes in work habits and cooperation that students exhibit in their classes.

We can also point to success with particular students, as in the case of Oscar. When we first met Oscar as a seventh grader, he stood clearly apart from the other ALAS students because he was such a dependent child. Oscar was so emotionally needy that he literally clung to the arms and hands of ALAS staff. His face exuded sadness and indeed Oscar had a very sad life. Neglected and rejected

as a child, by seventh grade Oscar had lived in four step-family and grandparent configurations. According to Oscar he had been turned out from each family because he was just too loud, too noisy, too naughty... just too hard to take care of. In the previous year Oscar had moved in with his father (whom he hadn't lived with since age 2) and a step mother. After receiving his first report card of all fails except PE, we put Oscar on a daily teacher feedback report. He was very resistant and expressed concern when we informed him that his father would receive daily notes at home. We requested a parent conference and set-up with the father a specific home reward and penalty system for Oscar's school behavior. Daily feedback from teachers permitted ALAS staff to monitor Oscar's classwork completion and homework. We rewarded him for performance and withdrew attention when he failed to complete schoolwork. Through support and problem-solving counseling, Oscar learned to cope independently with school and peer problems. ALAS counselors also helped him come to grips with family problems and feelings of rejection. One day, near the end of seventh grade, Oscar entered the ALAS office and spontaneously announced to all present that he had discovered something. When asked what it was, Oscar responded that he had discovered that he wasn't a D person and that he wasn't a D student! Oscar is now finishing the eighth grade. He still needs daily notes sent home. And, as is the case for most teenagers, adults have to keep on his case about homework. However, he is no longer a clinger and has "taken charge" of several younger students whom he says need help. His grades are not high, but he is passing all of his classes, and even mentions now and then that he plans to go to college. Oscar was recently elected to student body office as the 9th grade artist!

Costs

We have also gathered some preliminary data on the time and resources being spent on the project. The project is currently funded at about $200,000 per year. But this figure includes not only intervention costs, but also the costs of conducting the research and evaluation of the project as well as other, auxiliary activities. Most of the intervention or program costs are related to personnel, particularly project staff who work at the school daily.

In order to get some idea of the amount and use of personnel time in actually running the ALAS program, project personnel periodically are required to keep detailed time-use records. These records are helpful in determining which activities require the most time from project staff. Ultimately, they will be used to determine which of the project activities are the most costly. A tabulation of staff time for one week in the second year of the project is shown in Table 4. The data indicate that ALAS staff spend much of their time directly on intervention activities--problem solving training, attendance monitoring, and progress reports. Although student bonding, in isolation, appears to occupy a small amount of staff time, as the previous discussion pointed out, most of the contact ALAS staff have with students promotes bonding.

The data indicate that project staff spend almost 150 hours per week on intervention activities. This averages out at a bit more than one hour per week per student at an average cost of less than $15. Over a 35 week school year the cost per student would be about $500. These costs are partially offset by additional revenues--currently about $25 per student per day--that school districts receive due to improved student attendance. Of course these figures do not include other direct

and contributed resources for the project, which will be analyzed when the final cost evaluation is conducted. But they do suggest that significant resources are needed to even begin to address the needs of the most disadvantaged students who attend urban schools. Yet these costs are easy to justify economically when compared to the large social costs associated with dropouts (Rumberger, 1987).

Summary and Conclusions

In 1913, Helen Todd, a factory inspector in Chicago, systematically questioned 500 children of immigrants about working and going to school: Would they choose to continue working long hours in the sweatshops or would they choose to go to school if they did not have to work? Four hundred and twelve children told her that they preferred factory labor to the monotony, humiliation and even sheer cruelty that they experienced in school (Kliebard, 1986).

Sixty years later, the high dropout rates among Mexican-American children suggest that many children of immigrants still find schools to be joyless places. Far too many of today's schools literally drive Chicano youth into the streets, or into deadend jobs, or into welfare lines--just as in 1913.

The middle school in which our project takes place is not atypical of urban schools attended by many poor, Latino youngsters. And like other schools, it is too often a place of little learning, much rejection, and senseless cruelty.

The ALAS project is attempting to counter this environment for the most problematic and lowest-achieving youngsters in the school. Although originally designed to focus on problem solving, monitoring, and training, the ALAS staff has expanded their intervention and become more involved in support and advocacy for students and their families. In doing so, we have developed a series

of principles to help cross three cultural boundaries that exist in the school: school culture, student culture, and Chicano culture. Some preliminary data suggest we are helping our students to successfully address the negative school culture that they experience and to remain in school.

Yet our goals of helping these children remain formidable. As other reformers have pointed out, even major attempts to reform schools are not always able to change the things that matter most--a positive school culture that supports children and promotes their learning.

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Table 1

Partial Results of 7th Grade Student Survey

Administered Summer 1991

Proportion Who:	Boys	Girls
Drink alcohol regularly (1-2 times/weekly)	16%	3%
Have ever attempted suicide	25%	22%
Have had trouble with police (stopped or arrested 2 times last year)	33%	21%
Have stolen something from a store (2 times in last year)	60%	61%
Are currently failing a class	50%	34%
Have had two or more physical fights since school began	51%	27%
Have good friends who are in gangs	65%	63%
Have ever thought about suicide	40%	50%
Have a close relative in jail	39%	63%
Have had anyone close die violently	45%	34%
Think they are a good person	78%	92%
Number responding	68	62

Table 2
ALAS Program:
Preliminary Outcomes for High-Risk Students

	Control Group	Treatment Group
Attrition:		
Original 7th Grade Cohort (Fall 1990)	45	45
Left school as of April 1992	12	4
Attendance 1st Semester 8th Grade:		
Mean days absent:		
English	14	12
Math	17	14
History	17	12
Science	17	12
Proportion Absent More Than 30 Days	21%	5%
Grades 1st Semester 8th Grade:		
Proportion Who Failed:		
English	45%	29%
Math	59%	37%
History	24%	18%
Science	24%	22%

Table 3
ALAS Program:
Preliminary Time and Cost Analysis

Program Activities	Total Per Week Hours	Percent	Cost
Problem Solving Training	29.1	19.7%	$397.80
Attendance Monitoring	17.1	11.6%	$127.33
Progress Reports	32.2	21.8%	$258.73
Parent Contacts	12.8	8.7%	$154.51
Student Bonding	2.5	1.7%	$ 32.22
Intervention Meetings	18.0	12.2%	$255.90
Intervention Supervision	10.0	6.8%	$263.80
Project administration	25.8	17.5%	$290.55
TOTAL	147.4	100%	$1,780.82

Per student (N+123)